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NAVIES AS INTERNATIONAL FACTORS—III

BY REAR-ADMIRAL A. T. MAHAN, U. S. N.

IN an article contributed by me to the NORTH AMERICAN in May last, I had occasion to mention the purpose of the German Government concerning the scope and development of its naval policy and the numbers of the fleet commensurate with that policy. This purpose was formulated in a law which as first passed, in 1900, was operative over a term of many years then, and to some extent now, still future. The principle underlying was expressed in a preamble which stated that it was essential to possess a navy of such force that to incur hostilities with it would jeopardize the supremacy of the greatest naval power—a parliamentary way of designating Great Britain without the personality of mentioning a name.

Upon this principle, which may be defined as that of securing national peace, coupled with power to take at any time such international action as the policy of the moment might dictate, the constitution and numbers of the prospective German fleet were decided. Germany has abounded in assurances that the progress of her navy from year to year has no reference to the current ship-building programme of Great Britain. This statement is doubtless literally true; and is to be reconciled with the preamble above quoted by the fact that, having then considered the present and probable future of British naval development, and the wide-spread naval and colonial responsibilities of the British Empire, it was possible to reach a very close approximation to the numbers and character of the vessels needed to meet the requirements of the German policy avowed. As a matter of fact, the result has been that the standard of British naval construction has been set in Germany; not that of German construction in Great Britain, except in the original design.

It is not necessary to know the precise reasoning by which the responsible German authorities reached the exact constitution and numbers laid down by them as corresponding to the principle. The reasoning may have been faulty; the conclusion erroneous,—inadequate or exaggerated. Indeed, that it was imperfect is testified by some subsequent amendments, not many, known as *novellæ*. Modification is inherent in all designs which have in them a principle of life, and in this the German scheme has illustrated the common lot; but the comprehensive precision of the principle, combined with the particular feature of legislative expenditure predetermined for many years, which is alien to American and British theory, have preserved consistency and harmony of action. In this the German result contrasts strongly with the fits and starts characteristic of government by party, of annual appropriations unenlightened by any continuous definiteness of scheme, in which regard to the votes of the voters takes precedence of regard to the interests of the voters—that is, of the nation.

I guard myself, of course, from expressing any serious dissent from the method of the United States and of Great Britain, in annual appropriations controlled by the legislature of each successive year. It is in accord with the genius of their institutions, and therefore best suited to their practice; while it possesses the incontestable merit of preserving the guardianship of the purse which is the foundation of their edifice of liberty. In short, it is consistent with their whole scheme of government; while the drawback, that expenditures are viewed not with a single eye to national needs, but with a double regard to that and to the next election, is equally characteristic and perhaps equally essential to government by the people.

The difference between this method and the German is that which naturally exists between governments where the executive preponderates and that where the legislature does; and the result accordingly is greater executive efficiency in the one and less in the other. Representative Germans deprecate government by party. Experience shows that they are right, so far as executive results are concerned; and it is an important question for consideration whether, in the present tendency of the world, executive efficiency is not about to become the most essential attribute of government. More and more, in our individualistic

scheme of popular government, we are feeling, and legislation is showing, the need of governmental, that is, of executive, control. That such control depends upon legislation does not invalidate the fact that in exercise it is an executive function.

The unsteadiness of naval policy dependent upon party government has received recent conspicuous illustration in Great Britain, the country which most of all depends upon naval efficiency. The particular feature of British government, that the executive is a commission chosen from the legislature, thus qualifying the opposition of idea between executive and legislative functions, has not prevented the policy of a party, appealing for popular support, from bidding for such support by economies, real or apparent; the reaction from which, itself the reflection of popular alarm, is found in a one year's sudden immense increase of expenditure. In our own government, where legislature and executive, though co-ordinate, are distinct in person as in function, each must lean naturally to the support of the functions which are intrusted to it. The executive cannot but desire means fully adequate to the duties laid upon it; it will tend to err, if at all, by excess of demand in this direction. The legislature, controlling the expenditure, and responsible for its provision, will tend naturally to contest the executive estimates, even though it may in other directions be itself extravagant, for reasons more or less open to criticism.

Taking Germany and Great Britain for momentary comparison in respect of effective co-operation between executive and legislature, it may justly be said that the former illustrates a measured, graduated progress, dependent upon principle, and upon calculation based on principle; whereas the other, while certainly not without a general conviction of the need of naval supremacy, which does rough duty as a principle, does not possess that definiteness of conception which results in a fixed and calculated policy. The "Two Power Standard" and "The two keels for one"—that is, two ships laid down for Germany's one—are phrases with a meaning; but, although the former is in essence more than a century old, neither represents a process of reasoning. They are simply snap judgments; not the outcome of mental consideration, acting upon known factors deliberately weighed and measured.

The German principle—I speak of the principle only, neither criticizing nor indorsing the calculations based upon it—possesses among other merits the very great one of asserting with absolute clearness that the constitution and numbers of a navy are not a matter of domestic policy, but of foreign relations. I lay stress upon this, because I conceive, and further on shall attempt to show, that failure clearly to recognize this is the fundamental defect in naval policy as realized in the United States. It underlies the battledoor-and-shuttlecock contest, of one, or two, or more annual battle-ships, played between executive and legislature; or between opposing members in the legislature. Germany, says the declaration above quoted, needs a navy of such strength that the greatest naval power will not lightly incur hostilities. That certainly is a purely international consideration. It has nothing to do with German domestic affairs, except to indicate their dependence upon international security based upon armed force. It does not mean that Germany wants to fight Great Britain; even less that she imagines that in 1914 with sixteen *Dreadnoughts* she can successfully meet the British twenty-two, if these be concentrated. What it means is, that if Germany wishes to carry a point of foreign policy to which Great Britain objects—and their interests are markedly contrary in several quarters—Great Britain, despite her superior fleet, will think more than twice before her resistance takes the ultimate form of force, because that may mean war.

Men readily imagine that there has been no war when there has been no bloodshed, no fighting. War in modern conception and practice is business, not fighting. It is carrying a point through the opponent's sense of inability to resist. The less the fighting, the better the business; just as in a campaign of actual war the manœuvring which attains a result without fighting, by strategic dispositions placing a superior force in a point of decisive vantage, is more creditable than the bloodiest of head-on victories. Two hundred years ago a great French admiral said, "The best victories are those which cost least in blood, hemp and iron"—in life and in material.

These thoughts should be commonplaces; but they are not, because they are not common to most men. Austria, as a matter of international policy, three years ago assumed by force full sovereignty over Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was

a lawless act, in that it disregarded a treaty which was part of the public law of Europe; but it was justifiable, because it was evident that if in the Turkish revolution the Young Turks obtained control—as they have—they would have contested the conclusion. Under the new conditions, the continued existence of Turkish suzerainty over the two provinces would involve international friction, just as Turkish suzerainty over Crete, an empty yet vexatious political fact, has caused and is still causing much trouble and is pregnant of more. Turkey's recent purchase of two out-of-date German battle-ships is meant primarily to insure that Crete shall not go the way of her Balkan provinces.

The annexation by Austria was a change of political relation rather than of actual tenure; but all the same it was an act of war. When Russia and Great Britain showed resentment, and France discontent, Germany threw her sword into the balance. It would have been heavier if her fleet had progressed farther, but it was heavy enough. There was again war, but no bloodshed. Results were accomplished; but by force, however disguised. Bulgaria seized the same opportunity to cast off the Turkish suzerainty. Again force, war in all but striking; but Bulgaria was armed. Unlucky Greece, and still more unhappy Crete, were caught unprepared, or else were controlled successfully by the Western powers, so that the same opportunity slipped away from them unimproved. The most appealing and rightful of all political motives, the desire of two kindred and neighboring communities to come under one government, and of one of them to escape an alien bond, is denied; and they themselves have cause for regret that the hour found them unprepared. This very unreadiness is possibly the best justification for the continuance of that force which retains the Cretans still the nominal subjects of Turkey.

These instances have a special interest because they illustrate both why nations use force, and how law is incapable of meeting difficulties which force solves; not only easily, but finally, and for the best. By law Bosnia and Herzegovina belonged to Turkey, but were in Austrian occupation. It was expedient, beyond question, that the tenant should become the owner, but what law can be evoked to compel the transfer? Diplomacy may arrange, a tribunal can only decide. The change of Bulgaria to an independent from a tributary state was equally a transfer of ownership; beyond

law, though not beyond diplomacy, nor the force which is an expression of diplomatic factors. The continued dependence of Crete upon Turkey, instead of her desired incorporation with Greece, is the maintenance of a lawful ownership. No judge can reverse the facts or construe otherwise the law; but before the higher law of the reasonable wishes of the people affected it is a blatant iniquity.

More almost than armies, which in these changes were the instruments of forcible yet beneficent adjustments, navies are instruments of international relations. They are so more purely, because a navy, as has long been recognized, can scarcely be used to oppress the people of its country in their domestic conditions, as armies have been. While thus more strictly international, the scope of navies is also far wider. They can be felt where the national armies cannot go, except under naval protection. Just here it becomes necessary to point out a further distinction, which closely affects the United States and shows more clearly how entirely the navy, and consequently the numbers and constitution of the navy, is a matter to be determined by international considerations and not merely by those which are domestic and internal to the country. Exactly as a navy cannot be used as an instrument of domestic oppression, so in international affairs it is less effective for aggression than armies are; yet to a State whose frontiers are maritime, and to the external interests of such a State, it is because of its mobility more effective as a defensive force—for protection. The United States has neither the tradition nor the design to act aggressively beyond seas, but she has very important transmarine interests which need protection, as well as two home coasts separated by a great intervening space and open to attack.

The question for the United States, as regards the size of its navy, is not so much what it desires to accomplish as what it is willing or not willing to concede. For instance, we have shown plainly that we are unwilling to concede anything as regards the control of the Panama Canal, even to discuss the right to fortify it. The Monroe Doctrine, too, is only a claim to maintain security for that which we possess. In no sense does it propose to add to our holdings. How far is the country prepared to be obliged to concede on these points, because unready to maintain them by organized force?

It is upon such general considerations that the naval policy of a nation should be constituted. But the snare which the proverb asserts to lie in generalities must be recognized. A principle is essentially a generality. It is in the application of it to a concrete case that the difficulty lies. In that before us, the constitution and numbers of the necessary fleet is the result, to be sought by the application of the principle to the national conditions. Thus may be reached a defined and accepted policy, which, though lacking the regulated provision for a somewhat distant future which German institutions permit and have formulated, will nevertheless exercise over legislation a control that in result will be similar. The State will not contract a definite obligation to be fulfilled by successive legislatures, bound as by the interest of a debt, as Germany has done; but a definite standard may nevertheless be reached, and take such hold upon legislative and popular acceptance as will insure the same result without infringing the independence of each successive legislature. That such a result, of national purpose, can be reached, is shown by the general popular acceptance of the Monroe Doctrine as a national policy. The Monroe Doctrine in itself is a formulated principle; its successive developments have been applications of the principle. As German and French writers have aptly said, navies and armies should be national in the sense that their constitution and numbers reflect a national policy.

Germany has reached such a result. The chain of reasoning which has led to the precise figures is not known; but the first link, the principle, and the last, the application, are known. They affirm essentially that the determination of the aggregate strength of the navy is not merely, nor chiefly, a naval professional attribute; much less a technical one. The decision belongs specifically and above all to those upon whom rests the responsibility of sustaining the international policies of the country. It therefore cannot be governed by naval considerations only, nor by naval men; nor yet solely by the civil committees which in the national legislature represent naval considerations and control naval affairs, narrowly so called. Military and naval provision, to be correct, must reflect the international necessities of the country. Therefore, there must enter into these provisions the voices of those who do, or should, make it their business to understand the feelings of other nations and the temper

of their governments, which are the essential facts of international relations. With these are to be correlated the feelings of the people of the United States on specific subjects of international friction or ambitions.

The duties of legislation entail as a necessity the subdivision of the whole under special committees. But specialization has its dangers as well as its advantages, and there will exist always two complementary tendencies—that of the special committee to regard its subject as open to no intrusion, to be its business alone, and that of outside members to concede this claim and shove the matter out of their minds with the impression that the responsibility is off their shoulders—which is a mistake. The mistake, however, is so facile and so injurious that some provision is necessary to insure co-operation between committees whose subjects are related, and also between the committees themselves and the executive officers who are concerned with the same subject or subjects.

From what has been said it should be clear that foreign affairs and naval affairs have a close inter-connection, as well as that each has its own particular sphere of action which does not directly concern the other. All technical considerations, such as tonnage, armament, speed, as well as professional considerations touching the personnel, are in a somewhat narrow sense the attribute of the Committee on Naval Affairs, as committees. This condition does not exclude in any way the right and duty of any individual member of Congress to attempt to influence these upon the floor of the Houses, but it does indicate a line of severance between the functions of the naval and other committees. But questions of the aggregate power of the navy, and the consequent necessary ratio of annual increase; of the “life” of the heavier ships—that is, their period of useful existence, which evidently bears upon the power of the fleet; of the constitution of the fleet amid several classes of vessels—armored ships, cruisers, torpedo vessels, and so forth; all these bear upon the power of the nation to hold its course of policy amid the complications of international relations, as well as to insure the protection of its own home coasts and of its transmarine responsibilities. They therefore imply a knowledge, not merely of the actual naval force of other States, but of the temper and ambitions of their people and rulers, which ought to be the study, not of

the Department of State only, but of the committees on foreign affairs. I apprehend that nowhere does the separation between the co-ordinate branches of our government operate more disastrously than in the sphere of foreign relations; for this is the subject from which the average congressman most easily releases his conscience, because it is of the least interest to his constituents and its importance has not come home to his own consciousness.

Mutual intrusion of the several committees upon one another's deliberations would waste time and not tend to harmony. What is needed to meet the exigency is a formal provision by which they shall come together either as bodies or by representative members for consultation and interchange of views; that the conclusions of the naval committees upon data peculiar to their own special information and procedure should be duly affected by other data not similarly at their disposal. The naval policy of the country as regards the power of the fleet will not be properly ordered until an arrangement is made by which the foreign relations and naval factors are co-ordinated in some procedure in which both are considered; not only separately, but in connection one with the other. Why one annual battle-ship? or why two? is not a naval question chiefly, if at all. It is a political question, in the sphere of foreign relations. For similar reasons it is necessary that in such procedure the executive and the legislative branches both be represented; for while co-ordinate, and perhaps even because co-ordinate, it is true, as before pointed out, that each represents views contrasted and, in measure, even opposing. Mutual discussion, face to face, is the best remedy for such ills, the best provision to elicit a solution in which the several factors are properly adjusted into a whole, corresponding as nearly as may be to the nation's requirements.

A very striking recognition of the advantage of the course here advocated is to be found in the recent Imperial Conference between Great Britain and her four self-governing dependencies—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa—in May and June last. While many matters of common interest were proposed and discussed, it is known that a dominating consideration in this as in its predecessors was that of Imperial Defense, and the best means of effecting this by a fixed co-operation established between the

five communities affected. By general admission, the most significant feature of the procedure was the communication of the actual state of foreign relations and their bearing upon the policy of the Empire to the representatives of the several dominions by the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In fact, for this occasion the over-sea members of the Conference sat conjointly in secret session with the British Committee on Imperial Defense, the constitution of which will be given later, and of which the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs is a principal member. The connection between foreign relations and the general question of imperial defense by navy and army could scarcely be more signally illustrated, and this view is confirmed by the expressed appreciation of several of the colonial representatives.

It seems so obvious that the military and naval development of the nation are in some measure co-ordinate that I have thought it inexpedient to devote any of my space to the elaboration of this thought; the more so that it appears to me less important, and at the same time more obviously apparent to ordinary impression, than the relation existing between naval affairs and diplomacy, in the broad sense which covers all foreign relations. To countries situated as are the United States and Great Britain, the element of force in international relations is represented primarily by their navies, though the armies also have their share. It has been well said that the great strength of Great Britain in the Seven Years' War, which determined the future of North America and of India as they are to-day, was that the three co-ordinate factors, army, diplomacy and navy, were in the hands of one man—the first Pitt. The same was true in reduced measure of Frederick and Napoleon, though neither wielded a navy; a fact which was their weakness.

In the long run, however, for purposes of deliberation, one man is never equal to several men. We note easily the force of a one-man power; but, when he is great and distinguished, in the blaze of his efficiency we realize less easily, though we perfectly well know, the ultimate weakness of unconditioned authority. A dictator may be well enough for six months; for perpetuity and ordinary occasions let us have equals. My old instructor in navigation used to say that the average of a dozen observations is safer than to trust one you think particularly excellent. This is the theory

of popular and of representative government in a nutshell. The average judgment of all the people is in the long run better than the judgment of the one wisest. But when deliberation is followed by execution, the responsibility of action should be individual.

What is needed, therefore, is not an autocrat, even though he hold power at the will of the people, but a body in which the army, foreign relations and the navy are adequately represented; and at the same time the co-ordinate, yet opposed, functions of government—the executive and the legislature. In Great Britain this result was reached some dozen years ago by the institution of a committee of the cabinet called the Defense Committee. It is presided over by the head of the government, the Prime Minister, and includes always those members of the cabinet to whom in our system correspond the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of the Treasury. Other members are the Secretaries for the Colonies and for India. To these civil representatives are added four military, two army and two navy. Like the others, these two are *ex-officio*; being the chief among those concerned with the organization, direction and efficiency of the two military services.

Foreign and colonial interests, which combined constitute the imperial interests of the State, are thus united under one consultative body; and to this civil membership is added adequate representation of the military services. The total, eleven, is more compact than would be possible to us, because each of the civilian members is necessarily in the legislature, as well as charged with executive functions. There therefore is no need to make special provision for representation of the legislature, as there would be if a like scheme were adopted in the United States; for, as has been said, in such a body it is necessary to combine not only civil and military, but executive and legislature in one matured, harmonious decision.

The advisability of adopting such a measure does not rest upon the example of the one other great democratic country besides our own, but upon considerations such as those imperfectly developed in the body of this article. Nevertheless, the need of which the British Defense Committee is the exponent is as real here as there, and it has been satisfied in large measure by the Defense Committee.

A bill is now before Congress constituting a similar body to be styled a Council of National Defense, with a membership of fourteen. In general principle the proposed constitution of this body represents the same elements as the British—executive, legislature, army, and navy. The most marked difference is that the Secretary of State does not appear in the American scheme. This to me appears regrettable, as not duly recognizing the fundamental consideration of the close connection between foreign relations and military development. We also have no functionary equivalent to the British Prime Minister. The British Chief Executive is first among equals, has colleagues; the American President has none. Yet as constitutional Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy he probably has an indefeasible right to take the headship of any such body, while also in himself he sums up all the cabinet attributes, including diplomacy, army and navy. Should he take the chair in the meetings, all demands would be represented in his one person, while all necessary detailed information would be represented, *ex-officio*, by the combination of members. What better provision could be made for counsel to be followed by action?

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NOTE.—In the *Atlantic Monthly* for August Sir William White, for nearly twenty years chief constructor of the British navy, writes: "Efficient and economical administration of any navy can be achieved only when annual estimates *form part of a complete scheme*, embracing the creation and maintenance of a war fleet adequate for the defense of the country to which it belongs. That scheme may be modified from time to time, but it should be always in existence."